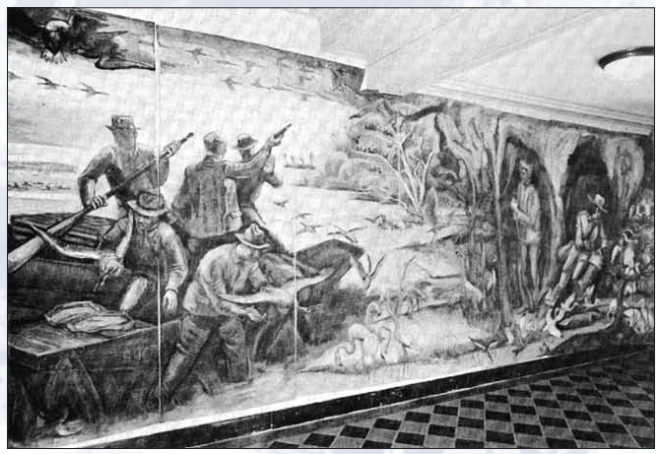
OUR VALUES ARE ETCHED IN THE LANDSCAPE

By Secretary Bruce Babbitt

Walk with me a while. Leaving my office, we stroll past portraits of **Stewart Udall** on the left wall, **James Watt** on the right, and the mighty **Harold L. Ickes** gazing down a corridor filled with my predecessors. Impressive. But the art we seek is of another sort: the New Deal murals of artists who sketched the core values of Interior's history. They are frozen, halftime snapshots that provide a good measure of where we have been and how far we have come.

At the sixth floor's north end mural, one man harvests salmonids in nets, the other stocks fry from a milk can. Classic New Deal stewardship, based around hatcheries, as we spread coldwater fish for harvest around the world. In a time of bounty, of seemingly unlimited resources, we saw fisheries as produce to be quantified.



Above and right, details of Conservation of American Wildlife *by Henry Varnum Poor, 1939.*

Assuming those fisheries were indestructible, we ground their product by the millions into feed and fertilizer. Assuming them interchangeable, we dumped European browns into Rainbow habitat, Rainbows into Cutthroat streams, Lake trout into brooks, Brook trout into lakes. The result was very nearly catastrophic. Hybridization diluted genetically pure strain stocks. Exotic fish, even sportfish, preyed on native species of trout, amphibians, and insects for the first time. Hatcheries helped spread whirling disease and other pathogens.

Today we strive to restore native trout and salmon, but as wildlife, not commodity. We deemphasize the role of hatcheries beyond recovery of rare species and spend more resources improving habitat. And we ensure that distinct strains are preserved and protected by barriers, so that a given stock can take root once again. We seek a quality, more than quantity, of fish.

One floor below, we stop at a mural of the Oklahoma Land Rush. Men and women on horseback, wagon, locomotive, and bicycle—armed with flagged stakes—are pouring off the start line to claim their plots of free land. It embodies America's boundless energy, growth spurts, and hunger for cheap soil.

The trouble today is where that hunger has led to sprawl, massive traffic congestion, and extinction of native wildlife. The Endangered Species Act gives us responsibility to deal with the crisis. How? We answer with creative new plans which fuse "habitat" and "open space."

For example, Los Angeles and San Diego have expanded toward each other like two magnets pointed end to end, eradicating the coastal sagebrush ecosystem that separates them. When the California gnatcatcher was listed as threatened in 1993, we could have proceeded straight to the laborious, time consuming process of drawing "critical habitat" lines on the maps.

We chose not to, because we had a better idea: unite adversaries toward a common goal on the front end to build consensus. Biologists taught us the components of coastal sage habitat, what made it unique, and how it functioned. Urban planners assessed growth and infrastructure issues before getting committed to the maps. Economists assessed how land values would be affected by different alternatives and how to finance the $100 million land acquisitions.

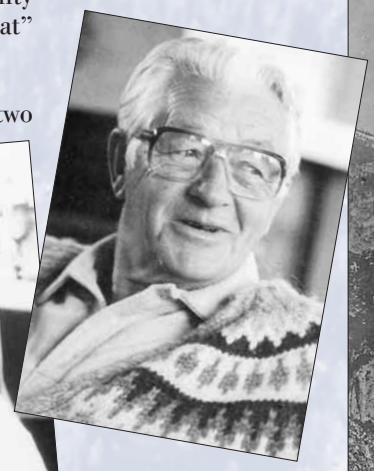
The outcome was a series of habitat conservation plans, which collectively comprise 210,000 acres in San Diego and Orange Counties. It is the most comprehensive and imaginative urban habitat plan in U.S. history, encompassing an area larger than Yosemite Valley and twice as large as Central Park; space for critters and people. Our ancestors, those Oklahoma Sooners on the wall, would have been proud.

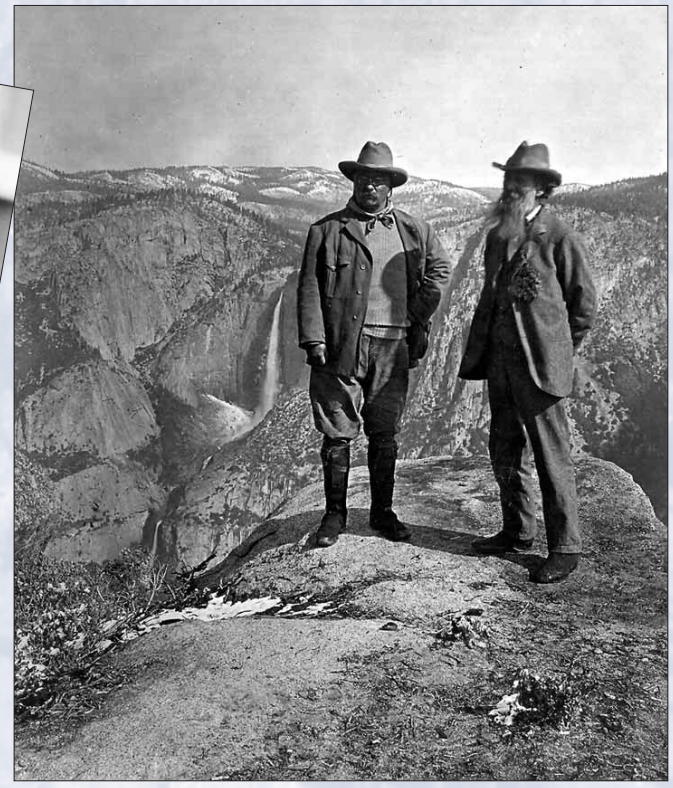
Down another floor, the murals show New Deal pipe welders involved in mining or oil drilling, another shows the gas stations, heavy machinery, and modern benefits that stem from it. We would not have beat the Depression or won World War II without minerals management.

Now, however, we face the legacy of that industrial boom. In the wake of Exxon Valdez and other spills, we must decide where offshore (and onshore) oil development is safe and appropriate and where it is not. We also seek a fair return on hardrock mining beyond $5 an acre, because prospectors no longer carry a pick and shovel.

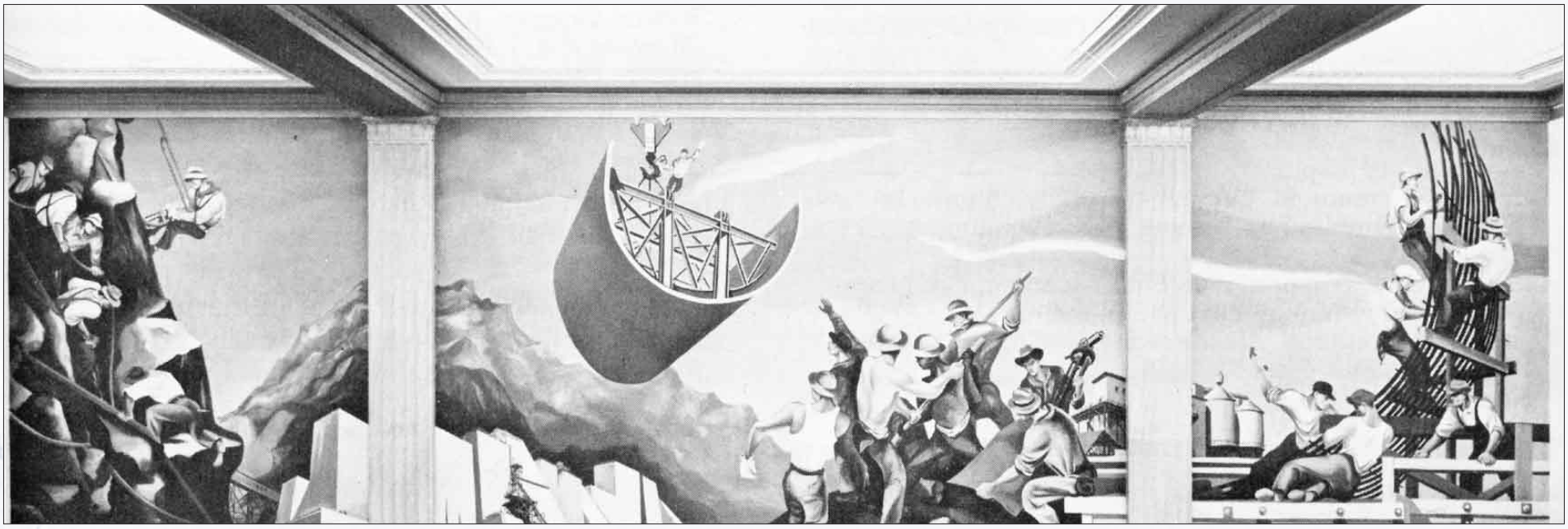
They led us closer to the realization that stewardship was less about wildlife manipulation than about restraining human excess, keeping our collective wants in check.

A third floor mural's pantheon of 19th century conservationists—**Henry David Thoreau**, **Daniel Boone**, **James Audubon**—are surrounded by flourishing fish and wildlife they have nurtured back to health. I might paint **John Wesley Powell**, **John Muir**, **Aldo Leopold**, **Rachel Carson**, and **Wallace Stegner** up in that firmament, for they each led us closer to the realization that "stewardship" was less about wildlife manipulation than about restraining human excess, keeping our collective wants in check. If we protected whole, integrated watersheds, that landscape will nurture and "manage" wildlife on its own.





The galaxy of 20th century thinkers and writers who helped to found today's environmental movement include, from left, John Wesley Powell, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Wallace Stegner, and John Muir, shown at right with President Theodore Roosevelt. These two founders of the American conservation movement visit Yosemite National Park in the early years of the 20th century.



Construction of a Dam *by William Gropper, 1939.*

It was these latter visionaries who showed us how we should focus less on individual charismatic creatures than on their connections within creation. Their writing, respectively, revealed relationships: between aridity and culture, between livestock and wild glacial valleys; a mountain, its wolves, deer, and vegetation; chemicals, soil, earthworms and birds; and between wilderness and the undomesticated American spirit.

On the second floor a mural shows four men swinging shovels, hoes, axes and picks in a united effort to suppress a wildfire that is raging in the background. Wildfire fighting became institutionalized in the New Deal. Postwar, it became a skilled, seasonal, standing army, whose common enemy was fire and whose policy was containment.

Detail of Fighting Forest Fire *by Ernest Fiene, 1938.*

For nine decades we suppressed all fire with disastrous results. By depriving forests of fire's slow, natural spread from lightning, we starve the forest, choke it, spread insect damage and disease. We wipe out native diverse vegetation and wildlife. Now we know that Smokey the Bear may have gone too far. Today, we use terra-torch, drip-torch, flamethrower, flaming ping pong balls, and fuses to "Fight Fire with Fire." Where property, lives, and homes are not at risk, a new policy encourages firefighters to carefully watch, monitor, or set prescribed fires.

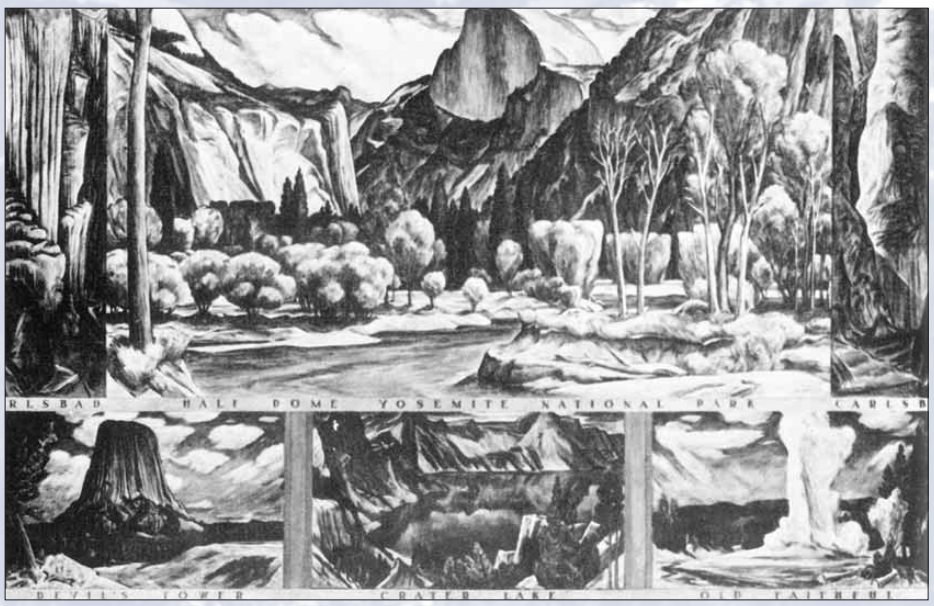
A facing wall shows the Civilian Conservation Corps at work, carefully planting trees. A noble intention, but again, with unintended results. We turned forests into tree farms, homogenized mixed conifer into monoculture. We once thought clearcuts created "edge habitat" for ungulate game. Now we better understand the affects of sunlight and erosion on ground exposed without a canopy and unanchored by roots. We once pulled logs out of streams to improve their aesthetic flow. Now we topple trees back in, and anchor logs and root wads for fish habitat.

Secretary Babbitt signals the release of six California condors from the Vermillion Cliffs of Arizona on December 12, 1996. The project seeks to re-establish a second wild population of the endangered species—the largest and rarest land bird in North America.

There is also, on the south end of this corridor, a mural of the New Deal's heroic age of dam building. Six decades ago, President **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** and his Interior Secretary, **Harold Ickes**, toured the country to dedicate dams, new dams, powerful dams, including four of the largest dams in the history of civilization.

They built dams for barge traffic, for electricity, for irrigation, for drinking water, for flood control. For most of this century, politicians have eagerly rushed in, amidst cheering crowds, to claim credit for the construction of 75,000 dams all across America.

The public is now learning that we have paid a steadily accumulating price for these projects in the form of: fish spawning runs destroyed, downstream rivers altered by changes in temperature, unnatural nutrient load and seasonal flows, wedges of sediment piling up behind structures, and delta wetlands degraded by lack of fresh water and saltwater intrusion. Rivers are always on the move and their inhabitants know no boundaries; salmon and shad do not read road maps, only stream currents. Now we are using sledgehammers, jackhammers, and heavy machinery to dismantle the old, obsolete, and destructive dams.



Detail of Themes of the National Parks *by David McCosh, 1940.*

One floor up, we find a mural of some of the newly protected national parks. Today, some say these parks are being 'loved to death,' so we should limit people. We answer that you can't love a park too much. The problem is not too many but too many cars all packed together. We need to give them more opportunities and more space to stretch out. Air pollution knows no local boundaries, and soon, the car gassing up in the mural may have to park outside national parks like Zion, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon, and take cleaner mass transit into the park.

Also, we will secure concessions and fee reform for visitor values at our national parks and other public lands. For decades, parks bled much of the revenues earned at entrance gates and other services, while depending on Congress for supplemental handouts. With these reforms in place, we keep 80 percent of fees and a greater percentage of concessions in the parks themselves, making them far more self-sufficient and rewarding experiences.

Throughout his tenure, Secretary Babbitt, above, has used the "Bully Pulpit" in the tradition of President Teddy Roosevelt to fight for environmental restoration and to promote the sustainable development and use of natural resources. At right, the Secretary and Fish and Wildlife Director Jamie Rappaport Clark move a Mexican gray wolf to an acclimation pen on Jan. 26, 1998, prior to the wolf's release into the Apache-Sitgreaves and Gila National Forests in eastern Arizona and western New Mexico. Five of the 11 wolves reintroduced were shot to death, others died naturally or were recaptured. While federal and state law officers investigate the shootings, additional Mexican gray wolves have been reintroduced.

A south wing, fourth floor mural depicts encounters between caucasian, or Easterners, with Native Americans and Alaska Natives. One is clad in cavalry uniform, another in buckskin, another in civilian clothing. There is a peace pipe, but in each case it is clear who is teaching, lecturing, dictating to whom.

Since its founding, the Interior Department has carried out trust responsibilities for Native Americans. Unfortunately, for much of that history the relationship has been paternalistic, barely protecting Indian water rights and sovereignty—as Washington saw fit. We have begun to restore integrity and authority and sovereignty to tribal governments, both through statutory authority and economic development. At its core, our policy moves toward self-determination for tribes and in the process, shrinks the federal BIA bureaucracy.

And consider this: A President uses his authority under the Antiquities Act to create a federally protected national monument. Western Congressmen howl. The Governor fumes about the loss of "job-creating industries," now that mining, logging, and other extractive practices will be "locked out" of "potentially vast, unlimited" resources. Senators complain about "arrogant acts" of the executive branch. The law stands. Then quietly, visitation soars, bringing a steady infusion of cash to rural economies. Years pass, and soon former opponents claim credit for creation of the monument in their next campaign.

Science has led us to a broader, deeper understanding of our natural, cultural, and historic heritage. Our decisions appear better informed, more sensitive.

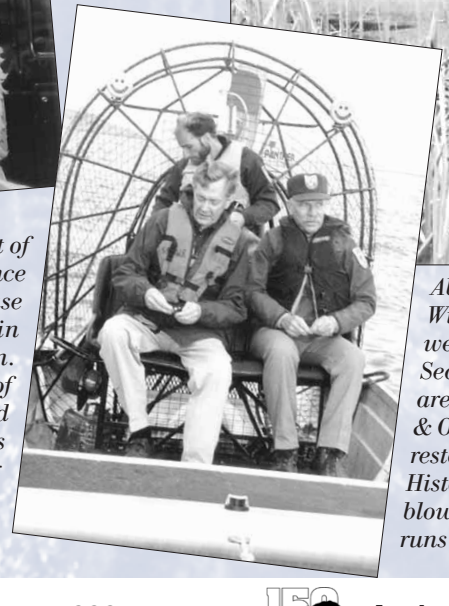
President Clinton's Grand Staircase-Escalante in 1996? No, **Teddy Roosevelt's** Grand Canyon in 1904. It may seem like things haven't changed very much. That there is nothing new under the sun. But take a closer look. You'll see that this latest monument isn't managed by the National Park Service, but by the Bureau of Land Management with a comprehensive outreach plan that includes the people and living heritage in the visitation plan. And ecological resources play as strong a role as aesthetic considerations.

I often reflect on these changes. The contrasts between then and now are manifest. Science has led us to a broader, deeper understanding of our natural, cultural, and historic heritage. Our decisions appear better informed, more sensitive.

Yet I wonder. In the next century, Interior Secretaries may look at our values, frozen in photographic images—dam destruction, salmonid habitat restoration, wolf reintroduction, prescribed fires, bioinvasive species control, amphibian protection, pollinator preservation—shake their heads at how primitive our understanding was, and take pride in how much further they have come.

I hope that is the case. Each day informs the next. What we realize in our tour of the murals is that stewardship of the American landscape is not just a fixed point in time, or some place outdoors, or even an "issue" to be "handled" by one party or another. It is a tradition that endures only through our labor, an opportunity that lasts as long as we fight for it; part of our collective heritage, passed on like a torch; a job that brings all of us together under a common purpose.

Now let's get outside, where our values are etched in the landscape. That is our enduring legacy. And let's get back to work.



At top, Secretary Babbitt joints District of Columbia students at a Sept. 22, 1998 science class at Keniworth Aquatic Gardens to increase public awareness of the serious decline in amphibian populations across the nation. Above, Secretary Babbitt visits the Republic of Palau, which had been a U.S.-administered trust territory until it officially gained its independence in 1994. At right, the Secretary buckles up for an airboat tour of Salton Sea on Dec. 18, 1997.

Above, Secretary Babbitt and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Janet Mizzi explore wetlands below Jordanelle Dam during the Secretary's May 1998 visit to the Salt Lake City area. At right above, the Secretary hiked the C & O Canal in 1996 to raise public awareness for restoration of the Chesapeake and Ohio National Historical Park. Right, the Secretary strikes a blow for free-flowing rivers and restoring salmon runs at McPherrin Dam near Chico, California.